

Equity-Related Concepts & Terms

Access: In education, the term access typically refers to the ways in which educational institutions and policies ensure that students have equitable opportunities to take full advantage of their education. Increasing access generally requires schools to provide additional services or remove any actual or potential barriers that might prevent some students from equitable participation in certain courses or academic programs. Factors such as race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, perceived intellectual ability, past academic performance, special-education status, English language ability, and family income or educational-attainment levels—in addition to factors such as relative community affluence, geographical location, or school facilities—may contribute to certain students having less access to educational and training opportunities than other students.

Accommodation: Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, employers and unions, housing providers and service providers have a legal duty to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities who are adversely affected by a requirement, rule or standard. Queen's University is a service provider. Accommodation is necessary to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal opportunities, access and benefits. Employment, housing, services and facilities should be designed inclusively and must be adapted to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability in a way that promotes integration and full participation.

Being your authentic self: The work of inclusion should be about the inclusion of authentic, true, whole people who are naturally going to be different from each other. We encourage workplaces to challenge those unspoken norms and expectations that reward conformity and groupthink, understanding that these preconceived notions are running amok inside of most organizations.

Cultural humility: An openness to understanding oneself as a situated within culture(s) and to ongoing recognition and respect for other's cultural priorities and practices. A process that recognizes the multidimensional and fluid nature of culture, relations of power in cultural interactions, and that cultural knowledge cannot be "mastered". A process that involves a commitment and active engagement with communities, colleagues and the self. It requires a continual practice of self assessment and self-critique as lifelong learners and reflective professionals/ practitioners .

Cultural safety: Cultural safety occurs in a setting where the values, ethics, knowledge or epistemologies of individuals or groups are acknowledged and efforts are made through self-reflection and learning to take this into account in practice. A culturally unsafe teaching environment for Indigenous and racialized students and scholars for example, often results from a negative portrayal of Indigenous and racialized peoples in curricula, a lack of acknowledgement of the historical experience and effects of colonization and basic access barriers (geographic, linguistic or cultural.)

Diverse curriculum and training: What is being taught, from what perspective, and in what way is central to evaluating curriculum. When assessing curriculum, deciding on new streams or developing curricula, it is important to ensure educational equity is taken into consideration. It enhances your curricular offerings and fosters a learning environment that is diverse in perspectives and values alternate ways of learning, teaching, and knowledge production and translation.

Equity: The guarantee of fair treatment, access, and opportunity for all. It requires the identification and elimination of barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups and acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations in the areas of employment, the provision of goods and services, as well as living accommodations. Redressing unbalanced conditions is needed to achieve equality of opportunity for all groups.

Harassment: A course of vexatious comment or conduct known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome.

Implicit bias: Decisions that people make that are happening quite outside their conscious awareness but nevertheless have a systemic pattern to them. A hidden or unintentional preference for a particular group based on social identity such as race, gender, class, ability, or sexual orientation.

Intersectionality: A theoretical framework that reveals and recognizes the ways in which identity categories overlap to produce unique experiences of discrimination and oppression. A recognition that by focusing on a single aspect of marginality, we may fail to appropriately observe and remedy experiences resulting from a combination of marginalized positions.

Liberation/Justice: The ability to be grounded in one's evolving identity, to have free movement, to be free from bias, imposed expectations, surveillance, control, and violence towards one's identity. Liberation is an ongoing process and practice of self-governance, accountability, responsibility, and transparency with oneself and within one's community. It requires ongoing acknowledgement of oppression in all its forms and on all levels of society, reparations, meaningful reconciliation directed by those targeted by oppression, and transformational changes on personal, positional, institutional and systemic levels of society.

Microaggression: Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward racialized people. Microaggressions appear in three forms: microassaults, microinsult, and microinvalidation.

Objectification/Tokenism: Used to describe the treatment of a person whereby their personality or feelings are disregarded. Objectification occurs if any of the following factors are present:

- Instrumentality - if the person is treated as a tool for another's purposes
- Denial of autonomy, inertness - if the person is treated as if lacking in agency or self-determination
- Ownership - if the person is treated as if owned by another
- Fungibility - if the person is treated as if interchangeable or replaceable
- Violability - if the person is treated as if permissible to physically harm
- Denial of subjectivity - if the person is treated as if there is no need to show concern for their feelings and experiences.

Oppression: Oppression is the use of power to disempower, marginalize, silence or otherwise subordinate one social group or category, often in order to further empower and/or privilege the oppressor. Systems of oppression produce social, economic, cultural, physical, etc. barriers and inequalities for people based on various axes of identity including (not limited to) gender identity, class, age, race, ability, religion. Social oppression may not require formally established organizational support to achieve its desired effect; it may be applied on a more informal, individual basis.

Power: The ability and authority to act, direct, influence and control. Personal, systemic and institutional access to decision making, communications, resources, networks and expertise.

Personal wellbeing / psychological safety: The highest-performing teams have one thing in common: they foster a climate where team members can thrive. Personal wellbeing is related to the quality of people's lives, their talents and capabilities, and their contributions to society. Psychological safety is the belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake. Studies show that psychological safety allows for moderate risk-taking, speaking your mind, and creativity. With this in mind, fostering an environment of belonging can boost the ways in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with situations of stress, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to the research community.

Privilege: Refers to advantages and benefits that accrue to individuals because of their membership in a group that holds a favourable position in society, rather than their merit. These advantages and benefits result from economic, legal, political, social structures that marginalize certain groups; it is a systemic condition that goes beyond personal intentions.

Racial discrimination: A form of racism. A distinction, intentional or not, that has the effect of imposing burdens, disadvantage, and loss of opportunity on individuals on the basis of race and race related grounds.

Racialization: Sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed.

Racialized minorities: Formerly more commonly referred to as 'non-white', 'visible minorities' or 'people of colour'. This term recognizes structural processes of racialization that have resulted in imposition of racially subordinate status on certain groups.

Racism: An ideology that explicitly or implicitly positions one racialized group as inherently superior to others. Although typically thought of in terms of interpersonal interactions (direct racism), it is supported by institutional policies; procedures and practices that work to the advantage of white people and the disadvantage of Indigenous and racialized people (structural/systemic racism). Racism often manifests in negative beliefs, assumptions and actions. However, it is not just perpetuated by individuals. It may be evident in organizational or institutional structures and programs as well as in individual thought or behaviour patterns. Racism oppresses and subordinates people because of racialized characteristics. It has a profound impact on social, economic, political and cultural life.

Respecting different ways of knowing: In Western societies, we tend to value only one way of knowing, the one grounded in data, analysis, logic, and theory—a rationalist's approach to truth. But there are many different ways to understand and engage with the world. These other ways of knowing are equally meaningful and are critical to our efforts to understand complexity and create the possibility for transformational social change. One of the frameworks used to grapple with the myriad of practices is the theory called Extended Epistemology, developed by Peter Reason and John Heron. This theory categorizes four interdependent ways of knowing: experiential knowing, presentational knowing, propositional knowing, and practical knowing. Storytelling is another example of an important way to express and pass on knowledge. First Nations, Inuit, and Metis cultures have long used oral-based knowledge systems, including storytelling, as an important way to express and pass on information and teach about cultural beliefs, values, customs, rituals, history, practices, relationships, and ways of life. First Nations storytelling is a foundation for holistic learning, relationship building, and experiential learning.

Unconscious bias: A bias is a preconceived idea about certain groups of people that individuals develop outside their own conscious awareness. These implicit associations inform our perception of a person or social group and can influence our decision-making and behaviour toward the target of the bias. Unconscious biases are not permanent, and we can take certain steps to limit their impact on our thoughts and behaviour.

White privilege: Refers to a socio-political system that distributes power, privilege and benefits unequally among groups in societies and countries in our world. It is rooted in the history of European colonial domination and settlement of the Americas, Asia and Africa, on one hand, and the 19th century practice of "race science" justifying this domination, on the other. These two phenomena have resulted in a set of political, social and cultural beliefs, assumptions and practices based on the primacy of one group over others.

Working across differences: In the workplace setting, cross-cultural competence means workers have the ability to understand, communicate, and effectively interact with people across cultures, be it their colleagues, customers, clients, or suppliers. Culturally competent businesses and organizations are those with policies, practices and systems designed to support and facilitate effective cross-cultural interactions in all areas of human relations, including recruitment, hiring, and retention practices.